



## **Education Committee**

### **HB 6881 An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators**

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Ranking members, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Amy O'Connor and I am the Chief of Staff for AFSCME Council 4 which represents 30,000 public and private employees including paraeducators in many districts across Connecticut. I am here to testify in support of HB 6881, An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators.

In Connecticut, there is a shortage of over 1,300 paraeducators in districts. This is a significant problem as paraeducators provide one-on-one assistance to special education students, reinforce instruction, and help teachers manage the classroom. A contributing factor to this recruitment and retention problem is due to the low wages, unaffordable healthcare, and lack of being valued. Paras often make minimum wage or slightly above it which is not a livable wage for anyone in Connecticut let alone someone with dependents. We're putting paraeducators in the position where they can provide critical support for students in the classroom for a low wage or make higher wages working retail like Target. It is morally wrong that we are not paying educators a living wage or providing them with affordable healthcare.

HB 6881 would help with recruitment and retention as well as showing paraeducators across Connecticut that they are valued for the important work that they do. By increasing paras to a living wage and making them 12 month employees it'll provide economic relief to them by letting them have a wage during the summer. The average wage for paraeducators is under \$25,000 and this bill would increase their income closer to a livable wage. This bill would also put paraeducators into the state partnership plan which will provide better, more affordable healthcare. When paraeducators have to use high deductible HSA plans it is not affordable due to their low wages. By putting them in the state partnership plan it would provide relief and better access to healthcare for paras.

I urge the committee to support HB 6881.